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ABSTRACT

A high school project growing out of efforts to involve students in a German-American tricentennial celebration and designed to make student-centered activities educationally meaningful to both social studies and German language students is described. The project had the following objectives: (1) to view, through an interdisciplinary approach, the contributions made by German-Americans to American society; (2) to raise students' awareness of and encourage use of local community resources; (3) to foster active student participation by taping oral interviews with German-Americans or business leaders in international trade; (4) to make students conscious of their own ethnic backgrounds and the contributions made to American culture by a variety of ethnic groups; and (5) to encourage students to recognize the role played by local businesses in international trade. The year's curriculum included major projects for specific classes in each discipline, activities involving all the students, and minor projects required of each participating language and social studies student. Results of the project included student enthusiasm for involvement in a trade fair, awareness of the importance of foreign trade for the state, development of interviewing techniques, development of cultural awareness and interest in preservation of culture, and awareness of the diversity of their family backgrounds. (MSE)

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From Grave Rubbings to Maximilian's Journey

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The project described in this chapter grew out of efforts to draw students of a rather large suburban high school into active participation in the recent German American Tricentennial celebration. As social studies and German teachers we shared a considerable number of students and this made an attractive opportunity for some interdisciplinary team teaching. We envisioned our goal to be raising the students' awareness of their cultural heritage and demonstrating the significance of foreign language study. All too often, foreign language students spend years learning grammar, memorizing vocabulary, and getting glimpses of unfamiliar customs without ever grasping the importance of language acquisition to their overall cultural sophistication. A "hands-on" experience seemed one way to remedy this.

We began our undertaking with a survey of the resources available to us in our community and found that they were more than enough to make it feasible. Although this project related specifically to German and the German-American heritage, interdisciplinary undertakings involving other languages and local resources could also be developed. To make the student-centered activities educationally meaningful to both social studies and language students, we agreed on the following objectives:

1. To pursue an integrated interdisciplinary approach in dealing with the contributions made by German-Americans to American society.
2. To raise the students' awareness of and encourage the use of local community resources.
3. To foster active student participation in the learning process through taping oral interviews with German-Americans or business leaders involved in international trade.

4. To make students conscious of their own ethnic backgrounds and appreciative of the contributions to American culture made by a variety of ethnic groups.
5. To encourage students to recognize the role played by local businesses in international trade.

We divided the work of the school year to include major projects for specific classes in each discipline, activities involving all of our students, and minor projects which were required of each participating language and social studies student. Both teachers presented their students with lists of required projects and a plan for the year's joint activities. One major emphasis was on having German language students and social studies students working together on projects that dealt with the influences of German-Americans on American society. Students responded enthusiastically. They began to discuss among themselves not only our suggestions but also their own ideas for personalizing the project.

The following is a brief indication of the work students could pursue individually. All language projects completed by first- and second-year students could be done in English. Those completed by third-year students could be done in English or German. The projects completed by fourth- and fifth-year German students had to be done in German. Written projects were to be a minimum of 500 words. Oral projects had to be at least five minutes in length, and a written version needed to be submitted to the instructor. The social studies students were able to select their activities from an extensive list. Their written projects were to be a minimum of 500 words and to include a bibliography of at least three sources. Students enrolled in German and a social studies class could do one project for both classes if all criteria were followed. Listed below are examples of suggested projects.

1. Collect memorabilia from the community and/or own home that would reflect German influences or German ethnic backgrounds. Papers could be developed to indicate investigative procedures and/or information gained. Appropriate materials or reports could be displayed on bulletin boards.
2. Use government records that can be related to genealogy (the tracing of family background for German ancestry and developing a family tree).

3. Provide a map of the world with a listing of countries and cities with which a family is associated and indicate which family members are from each area. Refer to the *Address Book for Germanic Genealogy*[1] by Ernest Thode in the local public library.
4. Do an architectural study of buildings and churches in the city. Compare and contrast with German architectural styles.
5. Exchange personal letters with a correspondent from one of the following German cities: Berlin, Hamburg, Hannover, Cologne.
6. Prepare a unit on German foods, eating habits, cultural differences, and table etiquette. A culminating activity could be to prepare a German meal and turn the classroom into a restaurant, following all procedures learned from the study unit. Visit a local German restaurant to experience authentic German food, order food in German, and speak only German all evening.
7. Discuss Thomas Nast's German ancestry and his role in American history. Give 5-10 examples (on separate topics) of his political cartoons. Indicate what influence his political cartoons might have had on the topics discussed. How might his German background have influenced his political philosophy? Provide copies of the political cartoons and a short summary of what each cartoon indicated.

Students were encouraged to read sources in German as well as English. Historical topics dealt with such areas as German immigration in the 1800s, the experience shared by German-Americans during the World Wars, and German influences on American education, science, business, or other areas of interest. Students were working together in a wide variety of activities that required an interdisciplinary, individual approach. Some did oral interviews with German-Americans. Others worked with local business enterprises involved in international trade. A few attended professional meetings, such as a program on global education sponsored jointly by the state foreign language and social studies organizations. More participated in competitive activities such as the National History Day contest, the Omaha area German-American Trade Fair, and an essay contest sponsored by the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany. They applied critical reading techniques to evaluate biased accounts of Germany or German-Americans during critical periods in American history such

as the World Wars. In addition to reading and writing, other communication skills were stressed when students did oral interviews, developed bulletin board displays, or made oral presentations. Students also had the opportunity to hear and learn from a variety of local community representatives. Among them were the director of an international management services organization for the state of Nebraska, a German prisoner of war who returned to live in Nebraska, and a representative from a local bank's international department who spoke on currency exchange rates and how international transactions are conducted.

Other teaching fields could have been involved, such as a computer-compiled statistical record on German-Americans in Nebraska, or a psychological profile of well-known German-Americans or prominent Germans.

The major projects which included all students or groups of them were (1) a German-American Trade Fair, (2) a unit on German settlement in the U.S., (3) a parent-guest-student evening at school, and (4) a trip to the Amana Colonies in Iowa.

The German-American Trade Fair[2] involved two German classes and one social studies class. It was held at the University of Nebraska at Omaha for ten participating area schools. The trade fair had teams representing German cities and American products competing against each other. It was the task of a five-member American product team to convince a five-member German city that the American company should locate in its city, and conversely the German city's task to convince the American company of the advantages of settling in its city. Each class researched all aspects of its assignment and shortly before the trade fair chose its five team members. The German students wrote letters in German to the appropriate German city governments and chambers of commerce to get as much information as possible. They also used the German Tourist Information offices, the Goethe Institute, and local resources. The social studies classes either created their own product or selected an American company that made a product suitable for export to Germany. They researched the companies selected, interviewed corporate representatives, and visited plants or headquarters, where possible. Each group prepared written materials, visual displays, and audio or video tapes for the competition.

Of the four, this project exceeded all expectations for success. It

offered opportunities for students to personalize a learning experience and underlined the importance of language skills for the conduct of international business.

The unit on German settlement was directed at the fourth-year German students. After the basic unit was presented, students were sent to cemeteries with German tombstones to make grave rubbings. The students returned to class the following day and hung the rubbings around the classroom. While sitting in front of the individual rubbings, students imagined that they were the ones whose names appeared on the rubbings. After translating the inscriptions into English, students wrote fictional autobiographical sketches in German depicting the lives of those individuals. Sketches included the reasons for emigrating from Germany, the trauma of the long voyage, the arrival in a strange land, and the motivation to continue the journey to Nebraska instead of settling in Pennsylvania or New York.

The parent-student-guest evening came at the end of the school year. It combined the display of all completed student projects with a special showing of photo-reproductions of the Bodmer collection owned by the InterNorth Corporation. The original water colors by Karl Bodmer, depicting the 1832-34 Missouri River expedition of Prince Maximilian, were at that time also on display in the local museum. The evening also included student skits about famous German Americans, and culminated with authentic German pastries. Over 300 guests attended.

The final activity was a trip to the Amana Colonies in Iowa. This unique community of German immigrants founded in the 1850s has preserved much of its cultural heritage without insulating itself from the larger American society in which it thrives. It thus presents a microcosm of "German-America" that gave our students a living example of what the Tricentennial celebration was about.

Other projects of lesser magnitude throughout the year exposed students to many other diverse activities. These activities were:

1. A joint conference on global education between the Nebraska State Council for Social Studies and the Nebraska Foreign Language Association.
2. The National History Day contest. The theme for the contest was Family and Community in History.

3. The annual foreign language week activities at the high school. Many of the activities related to German-Americans as well as to other ethnic groups. The week concluded with an international dinner for over 500 people.
4. The annual social studies department Ethnic Awareness day, where German-Americans were one of the groups emphasized.
5. A contest on famous German-Americans sponsored by the embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany.
6. A museum visit to view the Maximilian-Bodmer exhibition.

As we evaluated the year-long project, we felt we were successful in achieving most of our objectives. Students were very enthusiastic about their involvement in the trade fair, and two of our four teams won trophies. More important, our students became more aware of the importance of foreign trade for the state of Nebraska through interviews with local businesses and class presentations by business people from the community. Students developed interviewing techniques which resulted in better oral communication skills and increased awareness of local resources.

Students also developed a cultural awareness of German contributions to American society by seeing the Amana Colonies and by being engaged in a variety of research projects. The Maximilian-Bodmer presentation was especially forceful in illustrating to students how a German Prince's visit up the Missouri River in the 1830s had such a profound effect on their own local history. Students now realize what an important role a local museum can play in preserving a part of their own culture.

Research for the History Day projects enabled students to become more appreciative of the contributions made to their culture by German-Americans. Through their interviews with family members in the Omaha area and relatives from other parts of the country, students were able to engage in some research using primary sources. They became more aware of the diversity of their own family backgrounds while interviewing their relatives and collecting memorabilia for their displays. They were also able to place first and second in the historical papers division, and second in the projects division at the district level. One student also placed second in the projects division at the state level and qualified for a trip to Washington, D.C. at the national level.

All in all, we believe the students have appreciated that learning can cross departmental lines and be applied to a variety of disciplines.

Notes

1. Ernest Thode, *Address Book for Germanic Genealogy* (Rt 7, Box 306, Marietta, OH 45750, 1980).
2. For more information see Karl F. Otto, Jr., "Simulated Trade Fairs for High School Students," *Die Unterrichtspraxis* 16 (Fall 1983), pp. 267–273.

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